

A Bar Guide to Restaurants (and Vice Versa)

By SFA Board President Jay Oglesby

Though most of our favorite Birmingham restaurants have a strong beverage program, my wife Jackie and I often stop after dinner at a bar somewhere along the dive bar spectrum. Here are some of our favorite pairings:

- **Garage Café** leads to a wisteria-vined courtyard surrounded by 1930s era parking garages-cum-antique stalls. It is uniquely Birmingham. It's also a short stroll down the hill from one of our favorite Birmingham restaurants, **Bottega Café**.

-- Southside / 2304 10th Terrace S.

- **Mom's Basement** has a wide selection of beers, some wine and a few liquors to enjoy while playing board games or pinball machines. It's located below the small retail center where **Tropicaleo** serves fantastic Puerto Rican food.

-- East Avondale / 4411 3rd Ave S.

- **Red Lion** serves saltines and hoop cheese at happy hour. We head here for a cocktail or two after a very late brunch at **Big Bad Breakfast**, two floors above the Red Lion's semi-subterranean location.

-- Homewood / 1926 29th Ave S

- **The Nick** delivers all the dive bar essentials – eclectic juke box, beer-stained pool tables, and decades of smoke-stained live music handbills plastered on every surface. Although restaurants are theoretically walkable from the Nick, arrive and depart via rideshare or taxi.

-- Southside / 2514 10th Ave S / thenickrocks.com

We also like other sorts of bars:

The Woolworth is a recent addition to the 5 Points area. We go for duck pin bowling lanes (smaller balls with no finger holes and no rental shoes required), ping pong tables, foosball, a giant screen multi-arcade game with classics like Ms. Pac Man and Galaga, a bumper pool table, and a full bar. For after, there's a **Waffle House** a couple of doors down.

-- Five Points South / 1006 20th St. S. / woolworthbham.com

Atomic Lounge is where Feizal Valli and his team stir and pour original creations, including the legendary Sex Panther. They also provide board games and a menu of costumes. Yes, costumes. Don't knock it until you've sipped a perfectly executed Pisco Sour while wearing a full body lemur kit. **Café Dupont**, around the corner, serves a lovely rabbit gumbo in a white-table-clothed room in an historic building.

-- Downtown / 2113 1st Ave. N. / theatomiclounge.com

The Marble Ring is home to Jose Camacho, who runs the bar at this speakeasy with darn good cocktails. Look for the entrance tucked inside the **Fancy's on 5th** restaurant where a raw bar and burgers are the draws.

-- Avondale / 430 41st St. S. / fancyson5th.com/

The Lumbar is a new science-themed bar in Pepper Place, situated conveniently near two of our favorite Birmingham restaurants – Chris and Idie Hastings' **Ovenbird** with their smoky paella, among other creative and beautifully executed wood fired menu options; and, **Bettola**, where we enjoy James Lewis's Neapolitan style pizzas, charcuterie, and other seasonal Italian dishes.

-- Southside / 212 29th St. S. / lumbarbham.com

We also do things that don't involve drink:

Crestwood Shopping Center is the place to pick up your favorite beverage at Crestwood Coffee, browse mid-century and other antiques at Urban Suburban, and rummage extensive new and used music at Seasick Records.

Barber Motorsports Museum exhibits more than 1,000 motorcycles in its Guinness Book listed collection, from Grand Prix Sportbikes that race on the adjacent world-class raceway to Vespas and other utilitarian fare.

· **The Birmingham Botanical Gardens** are a free and beautiful place for a walk, and even more enjoyable if walking off lunch from **Social Feed** in the nearby Grand Bohemian, or **Chez Lulu** up the hill in English Village.